



About 2300 years ago, **Chandragupta Maurya** overthrew the ruling Nanda king of Magadha. He founded the first empire of India—the Mauryan Empire. The famous wise man **Kautilya** or **Chanakya** was his prime minister. A very big kingdom is called an **empire**. The empire of Chandragupta Maurya was many times larger than several *mahajanapadas* combined together of earlier period. Chandragupta conquered the whole of northern India upto the river Indus. He defeated Seleucus, the Greek ruler of west Asia and gained control over parts of present-day Afghanistan.

The Mauryan Dynasty

After a reign of 24 years, **Chandragupta Maurya** was succeeded by his son **Bindusara**. He extended the rule of the Mauryan Empire towards central and southern India. **Bindusara** was succeeded by his son **Ashoka**. When Ashoka came to the throne, Kalinga (modern Orissa) was the only kingdom which was unconquered. It was strategically located, as the route to south India and south-east Asia, both by land and sea, passed through it. The conquest of Kalinga would have added to the prosperity of the Mauryan Empire. Ashoka attacked Kalinga and conquered it after a fierce battle. Thus, members of the same family became ruler one after the other. Chandragupta, his son Bindusara, and Bindusara's son, Ashoka. They can also be termed as **Mauryas**. When members of the same family became rulers one after another, the family is called a **dynasty**. The Mauryas were a dynasty with three important rulers. A dynasty is usually known by the surname, which is inherited and common to all the family members. Thus, Chandragupta, Bindusara and Ashoka belonged to the Mauryan dynasty. The word 'dynasty' is derived from a Greek word 'dunastein' meaning **lordship**.

Sources for Studying Mauryan History

Books and archaeological excavations reveal the Mauryan history in detail. Greek ruler of west Asia, Seleucus Nicator sent an ambassador, **Megasthenese**, to the court of Chandragupta Maurya. Megasthenese's

detail account *Indica* tells us about the political, social and economic condition of that time. Kautilya, Chandragupta Maurya's prime minister wrote **Arthashastra**, a book on politics and the art of governance. Sanskrit drama Mudrarakshasha written by Vishakhadutta (2200 years ago) describes how Chandragupta came to power. Rock and pillar edicts of Ashoka are archeological sources of valuable information about the Mauryas.

Ashoka's Empire

Ashoka had a territory even larger than the present geographic area of India. It extended from Afghanistan, in the north-west upto Kaveri river in the south. Ashoka was one of the greatest rulers known to history. He instructed to carve his messages as **inscriptions** on pillars and rock surfaces. The top most part of a pillar is known as **capital**. Some of these capitals are now preserved in museums across the country. One of these capitals known as the **Rampurwa Bull** has now been placed in the Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi. It was found in Rampurwa, Bihar. The **Lion capital** of Sarnath pillar is preserved in the museum at Sarnath. It is now our national emblem.

The places where inscriptions of Ashoka have been found were included within his empire. Ashoka's inscriptions have been found in the present-day neighbouring countries. Some of the present-day eastern states of India were outside the Ashoka's empire. There were several cities in the empire. These included Pataliputra, Taxila and Ujjain. **Pataliputra** was the capital of the empire. **Taxila** was a gateway to the north-west, including central Asia. Most traders entered India through this route. **Ujjain** lay on the route from north to south India. These cities were important centres of trade. Craftspersons, merchants and officials lived in these cities. The villagers (farmers and herders) and the gatherers and hunters from the forests came to these cities to sell their produce and buy things of their need. The cities, therefore, became meeting points of different cultures. People living in cities often vied with each other in showing off their wealth and creations like arts and crafts.



The Bull capital



The Lion capital

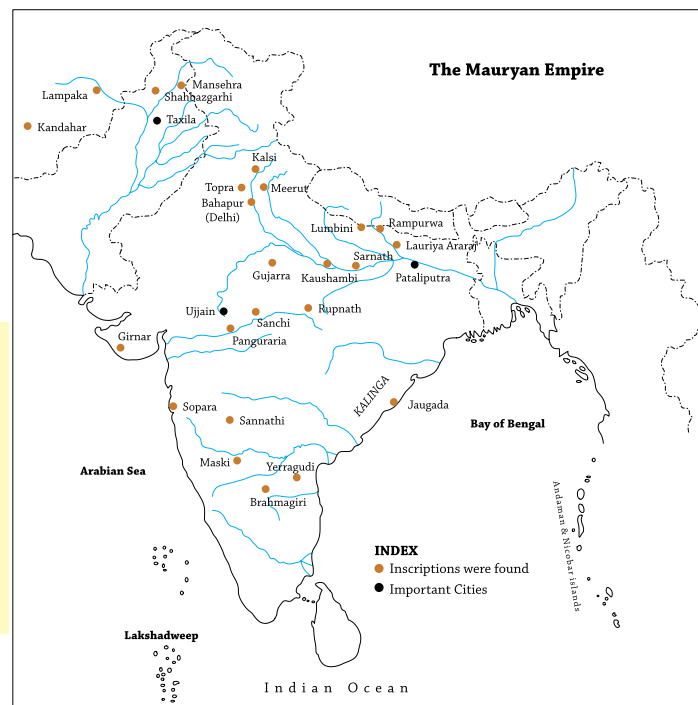
Empires vs Kingdoms

Empires were several times larger than kingdoms and needed to be protected by huge armies. So the emperors required bigger resources than the kings. So, also they needed a larger number of officials including tax collectors.


Ruling the Empire

The Mauryas had a huge army which was well equipped with armours, swords, shields, bows

ASHOKA THE EMPEROR WHO GAVE UP WAR



The Mauryan Empire, showing the principal Cities and some of the places where Inscriptions were found



and arrows. According to Megasthenese, the empire wielded a military of 6,00,000 infantry, 30,000 cavalry, 9,000 war elephants and 800 chariots. The army defended the kingdom from enemy attacks and maintained law and order within the empire. They were well-trained and regularly paid.

Different parts of this huge empire had to be ruled differently. Pataliputra and the surrounding area was under the direct control of the emperor. Salaried officials collected taxes from the farmers, herders, craftspersons and traders. Persons disobeying the ruler's orders were punished by the officials. Messengers and spies went to and fro to keep a watch on the officials. Over all the emperor supervised them all with the help of senior ministers and his family members.

Each of the provincial area was ruled from a **provincial capital** such as Taxila or Ujjain. Royal princes were often sent from Pataliputra to govern these areas, though local customs and rules continued to be followed.

There were other large areas between these centres. The Mauryas tried to control roads and rivers, important for transportation and collection of resources as tax and tribute. For example, the Arthashastra tells us that the north-west was important for blankets and south India for its gold and precious stones. Taxes were collected on regular basis. **Tribute** was a kind of gift to show gratitude or respect or a penalty by a loser in a battle. It was in the form of a variety of things more or less willingly and collected as and when possible. More or less independent people of the forested areas used to provide elephants, timber, honey and wax to the Mauryan officials.

Pataliputra and Chandragupta Maurya

Pataliputra (modern Patna) was a large city shaped like a parallelogram, surrounded by a wooden wall. The wall had holes carved out for the discharge of arrows during a battle. A moat (ditch filled with water) ran along the outer boundary of the wall providing extra safety.

In the words of Megasthenese : 'Pataliputra is surrounded by a massive wall. It has 570 towers and 64 gates. The houses of two and three storeys are built of wood and mud bricks. The king's palace is also of wood, and decorated with stone carvings. It is surrounded with gardens and enclosures for keeping birds.

The emperor appears in public carried in a golden palanquin. His guards ride elephants decorated with gold and silver. Some of the guards carry trees on which trained parrots circle about the head of the emperor.

The emperor is afraid that someone may try to kill him. He is normally surrounded by armed women. He never sleeps in the same bedroom for two nights. He has special servants to taste the food before he eats.

Ashoka's War with Kalinga

See map of Fig. 16.3. Kalinga was the ancient name of present day coastal Orissa. Eight years after becoming king, Ashoka attacked and conquered Kalinga after a fierce war. About one and a half lakh people were captured. And more than a lakh of people were killed.

Seeing so much violence and bloodshed, Ashoka, however became so sad and sorrowful that he decided not to fight any more wars. Ashoka is the only king in the history of the world who gave up conquest after winning a war.

Deciding To Observe Dhamma

'Dhamma' means religion. This is a part of declaration in one of Ashokan inscriptions :

'Whenever an independent land is conquered, lakhs of people die, and many are taken prisoners. *Brahmins* and monks also die. People **who are kind** to their relatives and friends, to their slaves and servants, die, or lose their loved ones. That is why I am sad, and **have decided** to observe *dhamma*, and to teach others about it as well **I believe that winning people over through *dhamma* is much better than conquering them through force.** I am inscribing this message for the future, so that my son and grandson after me should not think about war. Instead, they should try to think about how to spread *dhamma*'.

Ashoka's Dhamma

The most famous Mauryan ruler was Ashoka. He was inspired by the teachings of the Buddha. So, Ashoka's *dhamma* did not involve any worship or sacrifice. He felt that his subjects were like his children and he had a duty to teach or instruct them. But it was a difficult task as not all people were the Buddhists. People followed different religions and sometimes quarrelled with each other on religious matters. Animals were sacrificed. Slaves and servants were ill treated. Quarrels in families and amongst neighbours was a common thing. To solve these problems, Ashoka sent officials, known as the *dhamma mahamatta* from place to place teaching people about dhamma. However, officials could not reach to each person and not every one listened to them. Then he tried to take his message to the people through inscriptions on rocks and pillars. However, his officials read his message to those who could not read.

Ashoka was the first ruler who got his messages to people inscribed. Most of the Ashoka's inscriptions were in Prakrit language and were written in the Brahmi script. Most modern Indian scripts have developed from the Brahmi script over hundreds of years.

Early Brahmi


Devanagari (Hindi)

Bengali

Malayalam

Tamil

The letter 'a' written in different scripts



Ashoka also sent messengers to spread ideas about *dhamma* to other lands, such as Syria, Egypt, Greece and Sri Lanka. He sent his son Mahindra and daughter Sanghamitra to Sri Lanka to spread the message of the Buddha. He also built many Buddhist monasteries.

Ashoka's Message of Dhamma

These practices would be more fruitful than rituals :

1. Being gentle with slaves and servants
2. Respecting one's elders
3. Treating all creatures with compassion
4. Giving gifts (donations of food, clothes, etc.) to brahmins and monks
5. If one praises one's own religion while criticising another's, one is actually doing greater harm to one's own religion. Therefore, one should try to understand the main ideas of other's religion, and respect it.

One can easily realise that parts of Ashoka's messages are relevant even today.

Ashoka as a Ruler

While Ashoka maintained a large and powerful army to keep peace and his authority, he expanded friendly relations with the countries across Asia and Europe. He also sponsored Buddhist missions to these countries.

In his own empire Ashoka did many jobs of people's welfare. He built roads, dug wells and built rest houses. He arranged for medical treatment for both human beings and animals. He ensured fast and effective justice to people. He promoted education among the population at large. He set up nurseries to grow medicinal herbs for the use of common man. He established wildlife sanctuaries for the preservation of animals and plants. He followed Buddhism, but he never imposed his beliefs on people and granted them complete freedom to practise the religion they liked. Over 40 years of peace, harmony and prosperity made Ashoka one of the most successful and famous king in Indian history. He was also known as '*Priyadarsh*'.

The Decline of the Mauryas

After Ashoka, the Mauryan empire began to disintegrate because the rulers were weak and the officers corrupt. The administration deteriorated and roads were neglected. This affected traders and communication between different regions. This caused decline in revenue which made it difficult to maintain a large army. The governors of the distant provinces took advantage of the whole situation and declared independence. The Mauryan empire collapsed about 2200 years ago. In its place rose several new kingdoms. In the northwest, and in parts of north India, kings known as the **Indo-Greeks** ruled for

about one hundred years. They were followed by central Asian people known as the **Shakas**, who set up kingdoms in the north-west, north and western India.

In Other Parts of the World

About 2400 years ago, the emperors in China began building the Great Wall to protect the northern frontier of the country from pastoral people. The wall is about 6400 km long with a road along the top. There are watch towers all along, at distances of 100–200 m. It is made of stones and bricks. Thousands of people worked to build the wall. Many people died during building the wall and, therefore, it has been also nicknamed 'longest cemetery of Earth.'



Key Words

- » Capital : the top of a pillar.
- » Infantry : soldiers who fight on foot.
- » Cavalry : soldiers who fight on horses.
- » Dynasty : rule of a family on the hereditary basis.
- » Moat : a deep ditch dug around a fort, usually filled with water, to protect it from enemy attacks.
- » Empire : a large kingdom.
- » Museum : a building in which objects of interest or importance are preserved.
- » Dhamma : compassion, charity and righteousness.
- » Amatya : a minister.

Time Line

- ◆ Beginning of the Mauryan empire (more than 2300 years ago)


SUMMARY

- ▶ The empire of Chandragupta Maurya was many times larger than several mahajanapadas combined together of earlier period.
- ▶ The Mauryas were a dynasty with three important rulers: Chandragupta Maurya, his son Bindusara and Bindusara's son, Ashoka.
- ▶ Ashoka's empire extended from Afghanistan in the north-west up to Kaveri river in the south.
- ▶ Pataliputra, Taxila and Ujjain were three important cities of the Mauryan empire. These were capital and provincial capitals and trade centres.
- ▶ The Mauryas had a huge army, well trained and regularly paid.
- ▶ Ashoka attacked and conquered Kalinga after a fierce war. More than a lakh of people were killed.
- ▶ Seeing so much of violence and bloodshed, Ashoka became so sad and sorrowful that he decided not to fight any more wars.

Exercise Time

A. Tick (✓) the only correct choice amongst the following :

1. Founder of the Mauryan empire was :
a. Bindusara b. Ashoka c. Chandragupta d. Chanakya
2. Indica was written by :
a. Kautilya b. Megasthenese c. Seleucus d. Vishakhadutta

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3. Lion capital on our National emblem is part of the pillar at :
 - a. Sarnath
 - b. Taxila
 - c. Ujjain
 - d. Rampurwa
 4. Pataliputra had _____ gates.
 - a. 570
 - b. 64
 - c. 8
 - d. 10
 5. Ashoka's inscriptions were written in the _____ script.
 - a. Tamil
 - b. Sanskrit
 - c. Brahmi
 - d. Prakrit

B. Fill in the blanks :

1. Dhamma is the _____ form of the Sanskrit word Dharma.
2. Ashoka's empire extended from Afghanistan in the north west upto _____ river in the south.
3. The emperor Chandragupta Maurya was normally surrounded by armed _____.
4. Ashoka was also known as _____.
5. _____ and _____ are the two resources for finding Mauryan history.

C. Write true (T) or False (F) against the following statements in given brackets :

1. Chanakya wrote Arthashastra.
2. Taxila was the gateway to the south.
3. Kalinga was in present day Orissa.
4. Ashoka's policy of Dhamma was based on compassion and peace.
5. Ashoka wrote his inscriptions in Sanskrit.

D. Answer in one word or one phrase :

1. Who was the founder of the Mauryan empire ?
2. Who was Chanakya ?
3. What was the capital of the Mauryan empire ?
4. Who was the prime minister of Chandragupta Maurya ?
5. Through which kingdom the land and sea routes to south India and south-east Asia passed ?

E. Answer these questions briefly :

1. Make a list of the occupations of the people who lived within the Mauryan empire.
2. Why is Ashoka known as an emperor ?
3. What was the strength of Chandragupta Maurya's army ?
4. Why did Ashoka attack Kalinga ? What was its effect ?
5. What were the problems that Ashoka wanted to solve by introducing dhamma ?
6. What were the means adopted by Ashoka to spread the message of dhamma ?
7. What did Ashoka do for the welfare of his people ?
8. Give reasons for the decline of the Mauryan Empire ?

F. Answer these questions in detail :

1. Describe important features of the Mauryan administration.

PROJECT WORK

1. Find out the documents on which the lion capital is shown.
2. What four commands would you like to be inscribed ?